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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RABAT 000156

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STATE FOR S/CT AND NEA/MAG

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [ECIN](#) [MO](#) [XA](#)

SUBJECT: S/CT AMB. DAILEY AND DAS GRAY DISCUSS REGIONAL  
APPROACHES TO CT WITH ARAB MAGHREB UNION SYG BENYAHIA

REF: ALGIERS 157

Classified By: Classified by DCM Robert P. Jackson for reasons 1.4 (b)  
and  
(d).

11. (C) Summary: In a February 8 meeting in Rabat,  
Secretary-General of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) Habib

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Benyahia told S/CT Amb. Dailey and DAS Gray he was working  
to address the terror threat by advancing regional  
cooperation and development in the Maghreb region of North  
Africa. Benyahia observed that the AMU was actively  
promoting security cooperation among member states but  
allowed that more could be done in this regard. He  
underlined that security exchanges alone were insufficient  
and that "horizontal cooperation" in areas ranging from  
education and youth policy, agriculture, trade, and finance  
also needed to be enhanced. Benyahia called for an  
increase in technical cooperation between the AMU and the  
USG, to start with a consultation between a joint experts  
committee. DAS Gray welcomed the idea and hoped it could  
be pursued later in the spring. End summary.

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Fighting Terror at the Regional Level  
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12. (C) Welcoming S/CT Amb. Dailey, DAS Gray, DCM and party  
to the AMU Secretariat in Rabat, AMU Secretary-General  
Benyahia underscored his view that cooperation among states  
at the regional level would be a key to winning the  
struggle against extremism and terror in North Africa.  
Benyahia said the process was already underway, with  
consultations among Ministers of the Interior from the AMU  
states (Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya)  
held twice in the past two years. Among the projects the  
Ministers are working on is a regularization of exchanges  
of security information and a Maghreb-wide standard for  
national identity cards.

13. (C) Benyahia noted that the AMU had recently launched a  
process of consultations with the Economic Community of  
West African States (ECOWAS), of which several member  
states (Mali, Niger, and Senegal) share borders with the  
Arab Maghreb region. "Al-Qa'ida is investing heavily in  
the Sahel," Benyahia warned. Recalling his years as  
Foreign Minister of Tunisia, Benyahia lamented that the

Saudis had for too long confused Islam and Islamism. "We warned them they would get their fingers burned" by funding Wahhabi organizations, he recounted.

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An Expansive Approach Needed  
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14. (C) Citing the recent initiative with ECOWAS, Benyahia stressed the "...need to work with these states to find common solutions." The aim must be to address not only security issues in the narrow sense, but a range of priority issues that transcend political borders, citing desertification and water management as examples. "A terrorist may just be a terrorist, but at the same time, we must examine the underlying roots of terrorism," he stated. Whether among the AMU states, or between the Maghreb and other regions, "security cooperation is good, but it is not enough," Benyahia stressed.

15. (C) Benyahia repeatedly cited "horizontal cooperation" among AMU states, as a cornerstone of his strategy to advance regional integration. An area of particular focus is youth, he noted, emphasizing that job creation in the region was utterly failing to keep pace with the numbers of youth entering the labor market each year. The AMU has prompted a dialogue among member states' Ministries of Higher Education to find ways to better prepare students to engage in the global economy and address the "despair" which currently afflicts youth in the region.

16. (C) Paralleling this effort is the Maghreb Employers' Union (UME), founded at a conference in Marrakech in late 2006, Benyahia stated. The determination of the UME's leaders, key representatives of the private sector in AMU

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states, was hopeful. Promoting cross-investment and trade between AMU member states was key to employing the regions' youth, Benyahia asserted. An AMU development bank, already agreed in principle, would also complement this process, he stated, and would hopefully become operational before the end of 2008.

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Relations with the EU  
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17. (C) Benyahia recalled the fall 2008 Euro-Mediterranean dialogue meeting in Lisbon, and the January 20 meeting in Rabat of the "Five plus Five" group (the five AMU states on one side plus Spain, Portugal, France, Italy and Malta) and, the next day, between the AMU Ministers and the EU Troika. Now that the Lockerbie question has been resolved, trans-Mediterranean ties are back on track, Benyahia stated with satisfaction. The AMU states and their EU counterparts have agreed to establish an experts' commission that will identify sectors for technical cooperation.

18. (C) "The Europeans look at this region as their back yard," he observed, "and are concerned by the trends they see." Amb. Dailey agreed with Benyahia's assessment but, recalling his own consultations with European counterparts, thought "the Europeans actually look at this region as their front yard," so concerned were they with the current situation.

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Strengthening Ties to the USG  
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19. (C) Benyahia recalled with appreciation U/S Burns' initiative in calling a meeting of AMU Foreign Ministers in New York in September 2007. He hoped the model established in AMU consultations with the EU might be replicated in an

upgrade of dialogue and cooperation with the USG. DAS Gray agreed in principle that the U.S. and the AMU should set up a consultation of experts from the two sides to identify areas for technical cooperation. Such a meeting might be scheduled to coincide with the Regional Security Initiative meeting in Tunis in April, DAS Gray suggested. Benyahia was amenable to a meeting in Rabat, Tunis, or Washington.

¶10. (C) S/CT and NEA have cleared this cable.

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<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/rabat>  
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Riley